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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TAMIL INTERLOCUTORS SEE CEASEFIRE AS
INCREASINGLY FRAGILE

REF: A. COLOMBO 2018

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1944

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 1920

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Separate discussions with pro- and anti-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) contacts reveal a rare consensus: that the ceasefire is increasingly fragile and that Tiger leader Prabhakaran's threat to "advance the freedom struggle" if the Government rejects his bid for an interim administration should be taken seriously. Predictably, however, the contacts offer starkly different explanations for the purported change. Pro-LTTE sources claim that Prabhakaran is under popular pressure to demonstrate concrete gains from the ceasefire, while anti-LTTE interlocutors assert that the Tiger leader has been planning all along an eventual return to armed hostilities. While the ideological agendas of both sides obviously color the objectivity of their analysis, their atypically common conclusion--that the ceasefire may have reached the end of its useful life for Prabhakaran--underscores the urgency of a speedy return to the negotiating table. End summary.

THE PEACE PROCESS ACCORDING TO THE TNA:
PRABHAKARAN FLEXIBLE; PRESIDENT AMBITIOUS

[1](#)2. (C) In a December 13 meeting, Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MPs G.G. Ponnambalam and Joseph Pararajasingham faulted President Chandrika Kumaratunga for allowing her personal political ambitions (Ref B) to distract her focus on pursuing a negotiated settlement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). (Note: TNA MPs, who hold a total of 22 seats in Parliament, are described in the local media as Tiger proxies. A leading anti-Tiger Tamil politician derisively defines the acronym of their party as "Tiger-nominated Agents," a reference to the Tigers' manipulation of Parliamentary polling to ensure that only MPs sympathetic to their cause won in areas under their influence in the April 2004 elections. End note.) The MPs pointed to the Government's nomination of Peace Secretariat head Jayantha Dhanapala as a candidate for UN Secretary General as evidence of its lack of seriousness in advancing the peace process. The President's purported plans to transform Parliament into a constituent assembly to abolish the executive presidency and change the electoral system (Ref B) "would be disastrous for minority parties," Ponnambalam charged, and would mean the "end of the rule of law in this country." Kumaratunga has already rejected suggestions for a constituent assembly to address the grievances of the Tamil people; pushing for one purely in order to ensure her own political longevity instead denigrates the Tamils' legitimate aspirations, he indicated. The President cannot expect the LTTE to sit patiently by while she tinkers with the Constitution to safeguard her political future, he continued; instead, she should recognize "it is time to put personal interests aside."

[1](#)3. (C) Tiger leader Prabhakaran has showed "remarkable" restraint in maintaining the ceasefire despite the lack of progress toward negotiations, Ponnambalam claimed. Public statements from the U.S and others criticizing the LTTE for a lack of flexibility are unfair, he complained, blaming the Government for a rigid stance that left the LTTE with "nothing to show" after participating in several previous negotiations with the Government (1990, 1995 and 2002-2003). Poloff suggested that the Tigers' insistence that the President publicly accept their controversial proposal for an interim administration (known as the Interim Self-Governing Authority or "ISGA") as the sole basis of resumed negotiations was not a convincing display of flexibility--especially since the LTTE knows the Government's main coalition partner, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is dead set against it. Why not give the President a little political space by stepping back from that position? "We can show flexibility once talks begin," Ponnambalam replied, but

not in framing the agenda. "Otherwise we'll never get off the ground." Without public acceptance of the ISGA as a starting point, the Tigers can offer their Tamil constituents no evidence of progress in the peace talks, he asserted. "Any issues can be sorted out (later) at the negotiating table." JVP concerns that the ISGA is a stepping stone toward a permanent separate state for the Tamils are unfounded, he added, since the ISGA specifically mentions the Government of Sri Lanka. "This should put to rest arguments that the ISGA refers to a final solution" for a separate state, he said confidently. (Comment: We were not wholly convinced by this argument and do not believe that the JVP and other skeptics would find it persuasive. End comment.)

TNA'S BLUEPRINT FOR PEACE:
JETTISON THE JVP; UNITE WITH UNP

14. (C) Besides the President's preoccupation with her political future, the two TNA MPs cited coalition partner JVP as the greatest stumbling block to resuming negotiations. As long as the JVP remains in the government, Ponnambalam asserted, there will be no negotiations. The President should get rid of the extremist JVP and make common cause with the opposition United National Party (UNP), which is ideologically closer to the President's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, in the national interest, the MPs suggested. When asked why Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe would help Kumaratunga, his long-time political nemesis, ensure her place in history as the leader who brought peace to Sri Lanka, Ponnambalam replied that he believed the UNP would support the government in exchange for a guarantee that the President will not seek to abolish the executive presidency. Both MPs urged the U.S. and other members of the international community to exert greater pressure on Kumaratunga to accept LTTE leader Prabhakaran's terms for resuming negotiations, dump the JVP and come to an understanding with the UNP in the national interest.

WARNINGS OF A POSSIBLE "STEP BACK"
FROM THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

15. (C) When asked if the local media had misinterpreted Prabhakaran's Heroes' Day reference to having no choice but "to advance the freedom struggle of our people" if the Government fails to resume negotiations based on the ISGA (Ref C), both MPs replied that the press had highlighted "the correct paragraph" in the Tiger leader's speech. Both MPs stressed that the then-pending visit by Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim (Ref A) was "crucial" to the peace process because it marked the first visit from Oslo since Prabhakaran's Heroes' Day Address. If no substantive steps toward resuming talks materialize from the visit, the LTTE may have to take a "step back" from the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), they warned. Otherwise, the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) might misinterpret Tiger passivity as weakness. The GSL is content with the status quo and views the relative peace of the CFA--without the inconvenience of pursuing an actual settlement--as a sufficient end in itself, Ponnambalam indicated, but the status quo cannot last forever. For the LTTE, which he described as "essentially a military organization," the current no peace/no war limbo of the ceasefire is especially difficult.

PLOTE PERSPECTIVE

16. (C) In a separate meeting on December 14, D. Sidharthan, leader of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), a largely defunct former Tamil paramilitary organization opposed to the LTTE, agreed that the ceasefire is under increasing pressure. Like his TNA adversaries, he zeroed in on Prabhakaran's statement that the no war/no peace situation is "weakening the Tamil struggle." Since for the Tigers, the LTTE is synonymous with "the Tamil struggle," Prabhakaran is essentially admitting that maintaining the ceasefire is chipping away at the strength and discipline of his guerrilla force, Sidharthan explained, adding, "As a (former) militant, I know this is true." Prabhakaran's commitment to achieving a separate state is "absolute," Sidharthan declared; he will never accept anything less. Prabhakaran is doggedly insisting on the ISGA as the basis for negotiations, in Sidharthan's view, because the Tiger leader has calculated that once he secures agreement to that proposal, he will have secured effective acceptance of a "de facto separate state" and, no matter what he says now, will never come back for talks on a final settlement. Instead, according to Sidharthan, Prabhakaran is banking on the international community, its attention to Sri Lanka flagging once an interim settlement is achieved, eventually coming to

accept the temporary arrangement as a permanent one.

17. (C) Single-minded and impervious to influence, Prabhakaran will not waver from this position, Sidharthan predicted. Even international pressure is ineffective in prodding him to change, Sidharthan warned, adding that the Tiger leader knows the U.S. and others will do no more than issue statements and that India will not intervene directly again. Moreover, Prabhakaran is now confident that Karuna, the dissident military commander from the East, no longer poses a threat to his authority, Sidharthan said. For example, he noted, the LTTE has recently evicted 300 to 400 families of Karuna supporters from LTTE-controlled areas in the East. (Note: Even Douglas Devananda, the blustery head of the anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party who initially vowed to launch Karuna's political career, has all but admitted that his would-be protege no longer poses a challenge to the LTTE. In a separate conversation on December 14, the EPDP leader acknowledged that Karuna was not yet "ready" to return to Sri Lanka from an undisclosed location abroad--let alone enter politics--the closest we have heard the usually bombastic Devananda come to acknowledging defeat in this misadventure.)

18. (C) If Prabhakaran is single-mindedly intent on obtaining the ISGA, the Sinhalese south is just as focused on denying it to him, Sidharthan said, adding the "Sinhalese polity is not ready for the ISGA." This fundamental clash of objectives makes the ceasefire especially tenuous, he indicated. In a rare moment of agreement with his TNA rivals, Sidharthan charged that Sinhalese politicians, despite what they say, are not really interested in achieving a long-term settlement beyond the ceasefire. "Absence of war is peace for them," he said, "but that's not enough for us Tamils." He concluded, "The Sinhalese still don't understand what we are asking for."

NORWEGIANS NERVOUS

19. (C) In a separate conversation on December 13, even Norwegian diplomats, who are typically upbeat about progress toward negotiations, sounded relatively subdued and cautious. Second Secretary Kjersti Tromsdal said that while she does not believe that either party wants to return to war, there is a growing danger that they "might stumble into war" because of the increasing fragility of the ceasefire. Given the lack of trust between the two parties and the "muddy" domestic politics in the Sinhalese south, it will take some time before there will be an agreement to come back to the table for talks, she predicted. Political instability in the south is making the LTTE particularly reluctant to return to direct negotiations, she said, absent some greater clarity from the mainstream Sinhalese parties. She expressed particular concern about government coalition partner JVP, whose rabble-rousing in Trincomalee after Prabhakaran's Heroes' Day speech and whose anti-Norwegian propagandizing send conflicting and confusing signals. The absence of negotiations leaves only the CFA for the parties to fall back on, she commented; under these conditions, tense situations "can quickly escalate." With no other device to defuse tensions, the CFA is under constant pressure, making it all the more important that the Agreement be strengthened, she said.

COMMENT

10. (C) It is a rare moment when the TNA and PLOTE can agree on something. It is unfortunate that that something is a shared perception that the ceasefire--and Prabhakaran's patience with the status quo--are wearing thin. It seems plausible that the guerrilla leader is growing increasingly restive under the constraints of a protracted ceasefire--and increasingly suspicious that Kumaratunga has no intention of altering a status quo she finds favorable to her long-term political ambitions. For Kumaratunga, maintaining the ceasefire can be interpreted as a sign of success; for Prabhakaran, the head of a militant organization committed to an ethnic homeland, an indefinite ceasefire can be logistically and ideologically more costly. Although discerning the reclusive Tiger leader's current thinking is never easy, the TNA is our best source for learning the latest LTTE fare for diplomatic consumption. Based on this most recent TNA tirade, it seems that Prabhakaran--much like the President herself--has decided to place all the blame for stalled negotiations on the JVP. The TNA's proposal to overcome this obstacle--that the President commit political suicide by dumping the JVP in the (almost certainly) unfounded hope that the UNP will rush to her rescue--is so impracticable as to raise very serious doubts about the LTTE's sincerity in pursuing negotiations at all. With the LTTE adamant on the ISGA as the basis for negotiations, and the GSL just as adamant in rejecting it, prospects for an

expeditious return to the table seem bleak.

LUNSTEAD